



POUNDERS
1998

Bringing a Dream to Life

By *Coleen Vansant*, Public Information Manager, Alabama Forestry Commission

As children, we all have dreams. Dreams of what we want to do or be when we grow up. Some of us have visions of being astronauts, professional athletes, school teachers, firemen, or race car drivers. We dream of what kind of house we want to live in, the kind of car we want to drive, and even who we want to marry. For most of us, time and life circumstances change those dreams, and before long they're just a faint memory that we laugh about years later. For one pair of brothers in Franklin County, they are actually living the very dream they shared as young boys.

Twin brothers Joel and Jeff Pounders sat as boys on the top of high cliffs near their home in Franklin County and looked down into a beautiful pristine cove and dreamed of owning it one day. You can almost shut your eyes and listen as the two talk about what they wanted to do when they were the masters of the farm they so treasured. The two never

imagined that around three decades later they would actually stand as men on the top of the same cliff, looking down on the beautiful cove that they now share together.

Acquiring the Dream

Although it had been a long time since the two had dreamed of owning the property, when the first parcel came up for sale, they had not forgotten the promises made to one another long ago. They purchased their first 20-acre tract of land together, and as the years passed, they gradually added to it as property became available. They even managed to bring land back into the family that had been owned by their father and grandfather. Now, the farm includes around 360 acres that the twins' families own and manage together.

They may not have known it at the time, but life was preparing the two men for the dream that was to come. When time came for college, both attended the

University of North Alabama in Florence where they received their degrees in environmental biology. Being aware of natural science, when the time came to begin managing the property, they not only relied on their own knowledge, but went to the professionals that could help. Through the Alabama Forestry Commission, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Cooperative Extension System, and other natural resource and farm agencies, they got the assistance they needed to develop their farm plan and bring their dream to life.

Developing the Dream

Through an intensive management plan, the brothers were able to bring the land to life, with every action enhancing another element of the farm's environment. With wildlife as their primary objective, they knew the first thing they had to do was implement actions that would give them the quality and quantity of species they wanted. "Early on, there



were not numbers *or* quality of wildlife here,” Joel explains, primarily in reference to whitetailed deer. Providing a habitat that would grow quality antlers and enhance fawn production was first on their list. Through practices such as timber harvesting and planting, food plots and other routines, they have increased the deer population to a point that every year they do a very selective harvest, removing only the older age class deer. Now they may harvest six to eight mature, high-quality deer a year.

Turkey was another priority, which to them was measured by their brood rearing success. They targeted predator control, carefully planned mowing as not to disturb nests, conducted prescribed burns, and planted both warm and cold season annuals. Now they both talk about how it’s not a visit unless you see a gobbler fly down and strut in the distance.

Not only are native plant species encouraged to grow but supplemental plantings of oats, clover, chufa, millet and other game foods are planted and maintained to help attract wildlife. According to Jeff, the fescue and Bermuda grasses, originally started to sustain cattle farming years ago, have been removed and replaced with herbaceous plants.

With cost-share assistance the Pounders built a shallow water pond, or artificial wetland, that is drained every spring. This has brought many wildlife benefits, including habitat for wood ducks and visits from mallards. In the spring, turkeys also take advantage of the drained pond to forage for insects.

Managing the Forest

They both realized that developing the timber resources was one of their top priorities if they wanted to increase their wildlife habitat. According to Jeff, they



Jeff (left with Tatonka) and Joel (right with Ol' Yeller) show the quality of deer that they have harvested from their property. The brothers give names to the deer that frequently roam the property.

wanted to maintain the integrity of both the bottomland hardwood and water quality, but they knew they must manage for pine to give the deer and other wildlife species the habitat necessary to thrive. Through a lot of thought, planning, and design, they decided to intensively manage their ridge tops in a pine monoculture. Every harvest was carefully conducted, and they struggled with what to grow and where it should be grown. Now, around 30% (approximately 100 acres) of their forest resource is intensively-managed monoculture pine in early succession phases that provide thermal cover (bedding areas) for the white tailed deer, turkey, and other species. The two men together planted around 50,000 trees over a period of time.

During the harvest, special care was taken to keep irregular shapes and maintain wide streamside management zones (SMZs). Approximately 50% (about 180 acres) of their forest is in natural mixed

stands or bottomland hardwood that runs along Little Bear Creek. The remaining 20% of land area is maintained as forest clearings interspersed with wildlife plantings.

Water Quality

Little Bear Creek runs all the way through the cove and is actually the focal point of the farm. Preserving this feature is important to the brothers, and every action they take enhances the stream. Best management practices are followed

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Photo by Coleen Vansant



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The Pounders built this one-room cabin themselves, which includes a loft, kitchen, bathroom, and fireplace. The floors are cedar plank. The two also designed the porch railings.

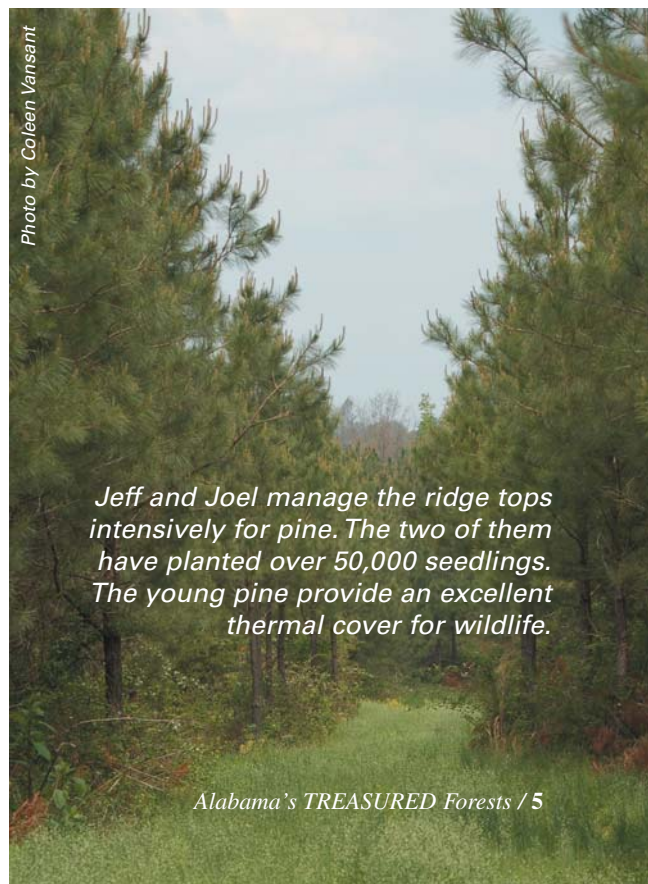


Photo by Coleen Vansant

Jeff and Joel manage the ridge tops intensively for pine. The two of them have planted over 50,000 seedlings. The young pine provide an excellent thermal cover for wildlife.

during all timber harvesting, and a very wide riparian zone is maintained. Stream crossings are maintained to allow little disturbance to the banks of the creek, and along their forest roads, water bars are established every 100 feet.

With the new cabin overlooking a sharp bend in the stream, keeping the integrity of the water is important. Both want their children to enjoy wading in the cool clear water and benefiting from all the diversity it brings. Joel and Rhonda have one daughter, Chloe, age 8. Jeff and Paula have three children: Gracie, age 5; Lily, age 3; and Ben, 8 months old.

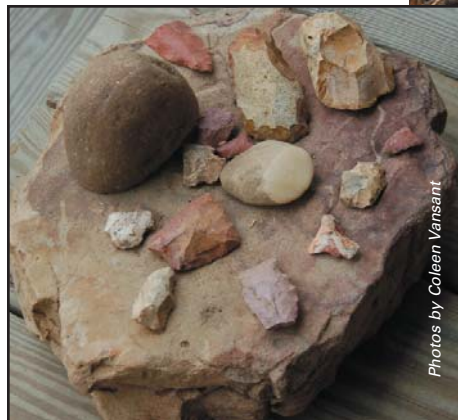
History

The Pounders' farm is located in a valley rich with local history. A collection of artifacts from broken bits of miscellaneous pottery to arrowheads have been found all across the farm. Primitive tools, hidden for thousands of years, have been discovered by the brothers inside rock shelters; evidence that early man once called this valley their home.

Two lonely graves, one a Native American burial mound, and the other marked only by a rough hand-hewn marker that reads "Josh Hill - 1814," give testimony to the rich and diverse history of the area, and to the fact that this peaceful valley had been a home and refuge to others before them.

Preserving the historical, cultural, and natural heritage of the property is a high priority to both men. Everything they do is carefully planned, and development is kept to an absolute minimum. Even the rustic cabin the pair built looks as if it could have been there at the turn of the last century.

Artifacts from Native Americans can be found around the valley, along with this lone grave of an early settler.



Photos by Coleen Varsant

Working Together for the Dream

Being twins, you would expect the brothers to have been close as children, but that bond has lasted into their adult lives. "We're the management team and the labor force," says Joel.

It's unusual for two people to share a single dream, and much more unusual for them to be able to work together to achieve and enjoy it. According to Joel, the benefits they enjoy are not financial ones. The greatest advantage they receive from their work is "preserving the integrity and beauty of the valley" that both have loved for a lifetime.

"We have shared objectives and shared responsibility," explains Jeff. "We set our goals and principals early, really early in life, and we've embraced them." Second to the Bible, the *Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold is both Jeff's and Joel's favorite book. In it, Leopold explains that with the land comes values that can be educational, economic, recre-

ational, and even moral and religious. "We embrace all of those," Jeff says. "The land is to be loved and respected."

Passing the Dream to Others

Education, or sharing what they have with others, is another priority with the Pounders. Both men are married to school teachers, so the property is used as an outdoor classroom for many of the local schools. They host educational programs each year which include local forestry groups, school teachers, school children, church groups, horses and riders, and many others.

Recently, a woman who was recovering from cancer came to the farm and participated in a turkey hunt. Fathers bring their sons to the valley to teach them hunting and an appreciation for the land.

These activities, along with many others, is what earned the pair the honor of Alabama Forest Conservationists of the Year in 2003 and the Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest award in 2005.

Keeping the Dream Alive

Keeping this valley in its native, pristine condition is a major priority for Jeff and Joel. According to them, a lot of blood, sweat, and tears have gone into their dream, as well as a lot of love for the land. For them, it's all about doing what is right and protecting the integrity and biodiversity of the land. "We bought into all the things we love," says Jeff. And with that investment has come the responsibility they both honor and embrace – being good stewards of the gifts and opportunities with which they have been blessed and entrusted. 🙏

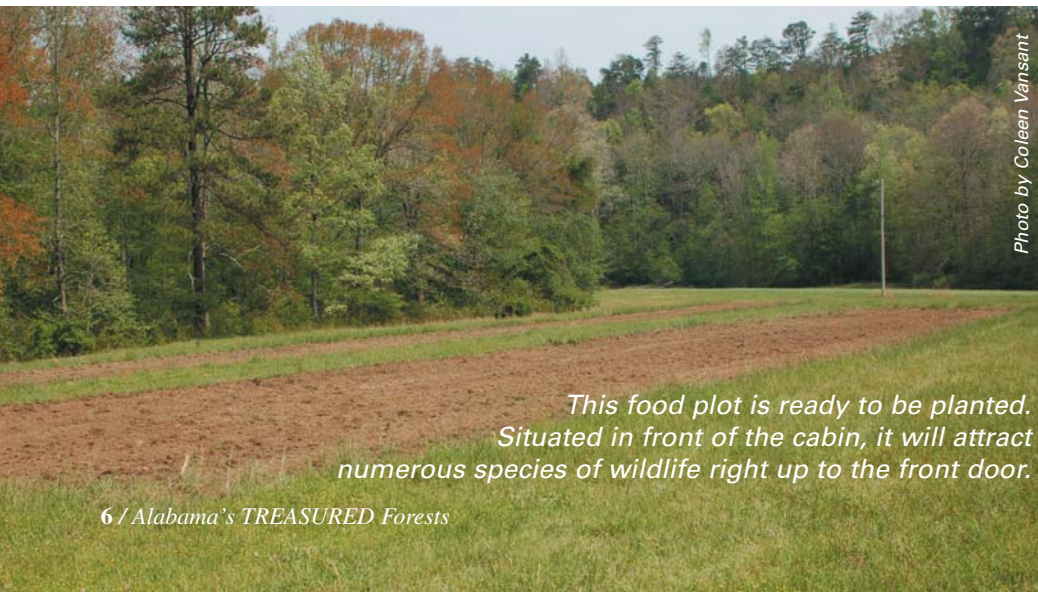


Photo by Coleen Varsant

This food plot is ready to be planted. Situated in front of the cabin, it will attract numerous species of wildlife right up to the front door.